

YANKEES IN REBEL PRISONS

BY SAMUEL HARRIS

Late 1st Lieutenant Co. A. 5th Mich. Cavalry

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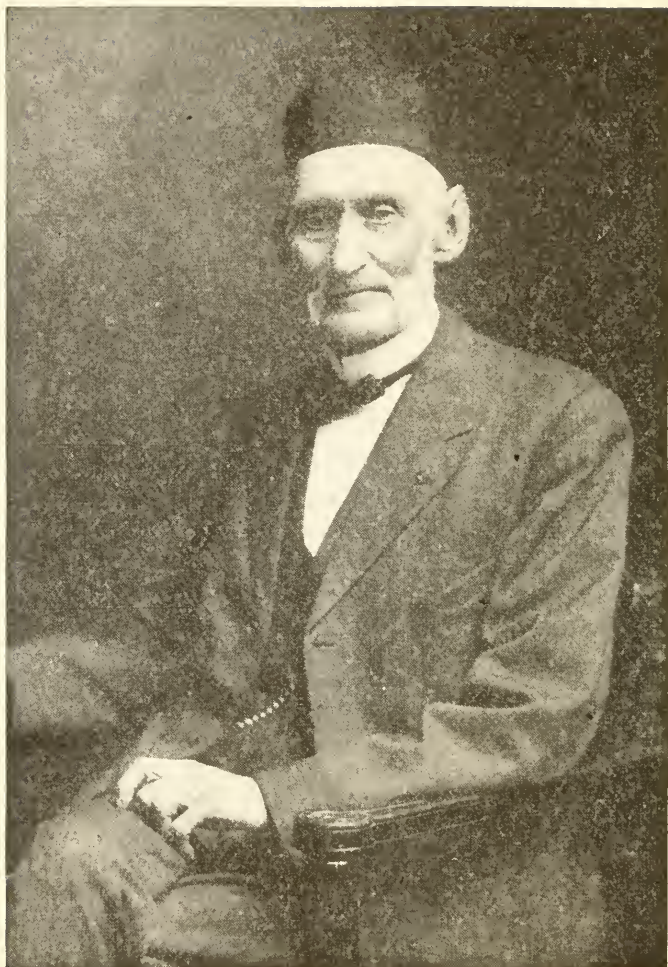
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SAMUEL HARRIS

**Late First Lieutenant Company A, Fifth Michigan Cavalry
Born September 15th, 1836**

YANKEES IN REBEL PRISONS

I have given all the incidents of my life in Libby Prison in a former pamphlet, entitled, "Why I was not Hung."

We were all moved south to Danville, Virginia. This was not a safe place to keep us, as we were too near General Grant and his army. After a stop of about ten days, we were sent by railroad to Augusta, Georgia. We were kept in the cars about twenty-four hours. It was said the citizens would not allow us to stay there for fear the Yanks would contaminate the air. We were sent on to Macon, Georgia. Here we were quartered in the State Fair Grounds. There were two old bildings on the grounds in which they put the wounded, sick and the older officers. I was placed in one corner of the larger building, on account of my wound, and I also had a bad case of diarrhoea. Soon after I was laid down a very pleasant rebel sergeant came by and I called to him. He asked me what he could do for me. I told him I wanted three

or four pounds of wheat flour, that I had a bad case of diarrhoea, and if I could get some flour, I could cure myself. He said "If I can possibly get some, you shall have it." Soon he came back with several pounds. Coming near me, he looked all about to see that no rebels could see him, laid it down by my side. I offered him a ten dollar Confederate bill. He said, "No, you will need it."

That man had a big heart in him. If he has passed on to the next world, I feel sure that he is in Heaven.

The Lord said, Matthew 25:36, "I was sick and ye visited me, I was in prison and ye came over to me."

The flour cured me, at least I lived, and the only one out of about a dozen that had the same disease.

The first two men that had command of the camp were very poor specimens of manhood. Then came quite a young man, Lieutenant Davis, a fine young man. He was with us only a short time. He left to become a spy for General Hood. He was soon caught and hanged.

A number of the old prisoners at Macon, Georgia, and who had been exchanged with me, tried our best to save him, but failed. The next officer in command of us was Colonel Gibbs of North Carolina, who was a good soldier and a gentleman. There were about 3,000 officers in this prison. The enlisted men were confined at Andersonville, Georgia. Soon there were new prisoners brought in. As soon as the gates

opened, the boys near by would yell, "Fresh Fish." Then there would be a grand rush for the gate. The new prisoners would think they were among a lot of wild Indians. The most of us were unshaved, with long hair and half naked.

One day Captain Green, the Adjutant-General of General Custer was brought in. He was woebegone and hungry. I cooked him some corn cakes, without salt or rising, and took them to him on an old rusty piece of stovepipe—the only plate I had. He burst out crying and asked me if it had come to that. I told him he was lucky to get that. He soon got used to the rations, which consisted of a quart of corn meal, ground, corn cob and all, two ounces of bacon, that was more maggots than bacon and 2 tablespoonfuls of burnt sorghum.

One day I was frying my bacon on an old piece of rusty iron, when out comes a big maggot about one-half inch long and one-eighth in diameter. He curled up and jumped nearly four inches high. I hollered as loud as I could that I had a maggot that could jump the highest of anyone in camp. In almost no time a big crowd gathered about me to see it—anything for a little fun.

After cooking the bacon on one side, we would scrape the maggots off the top and turn it over, when done, we would eat it, maggots and all, with a good relish. Talk about roast turkey now, it don't

taste half as good as that bacon did then when we were hungry.

Among us were men in every walk in life. We had a fine quartette of singers who entertained us with fine singing. A thousand or more voices would join in the chorus. There were also several very fine players on stringed instruments who used to give us very fine music. Several fine orators were with us. We called them out on July 4th, 1864, which we spent in Macon. These speeches were no rehash of some old brokendown politician. One of our officers pulled out from his shirt bosom, a beautiful American flag, made of blue silk, with the stars and stripes handsomely worked in colored silk. He said a young lady gave it to him, as they were marching the prisoners through a village. The flag was about 6x12 inches. When the officer unfurled it there was a deafening shout and a big rush to see it. The guards thought we were going to break camp. Colonel Gibbs came in to see what all the cheering was about. We told him it was our regular July 4th celebration. He turned on his heel and walked out.

Expert penmen among us used to make good imitations of greenbacks and pass them off on men that were allowed to come in to sell to us and to the guards for tobacco.

The rebels furnished us with brush brooms so we could sweep up the grounds. We would sweep up

the dirt in large piles. They would send in a cart and mule with a negro astride and a guard with each cart to keep the driver from talking to any Yank, but we were too cunning for them. We would interest the guard showing him some trinkets we had cut out of wood or bone, while some Yank would tell the darkey to bring in some elder about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch in diameter. We would cut it about 18 inches long and punch the pitch out. Some Yankee officer would want to escape, the cart would be backed up to a big pile of dirt, a half dozen officers would get around the pile and throw dirt in each others faces and raise such a dust, no one could see what was going on. During this the officer who wanted to escape would crawl into the cart, putting the elder in his mouth so he could breathe. Others would shovel the cart full to the brim. We would tell the driver to go by some house of prostitution and tell the girls to go out where he dumped his load and get a Yankee, no matter whether they were white or colored girls, they would supply him with food and start him on the road to our lines. Several of our officers escaped in this way and more would have been able to had it not been that a foolish young officer went out and was soon captured. He bragged how he escaped.

After being confined in Macon about two months, we were divided into three squads of about eight hundred each. I was put in squad number one, which

was sent to Savannah, Georgia. The other two squads were sent to Charleston, South Carolina.

On our way to Savannah our train had to lay on a siding some time, waiting for another train to pass.

While here we were allowed to get out of the cars and walk about within a few feet of them. They also allowed us to buy watermelons of the darkies, the melons were the largest and finest I ever saw. The next day we arrived in Savannah and were marched out about two miles and put in the yard of the Oglethorpe or Marine Hospital. Here we were turned over to the command of a large company of men called "The Marion Guards." Each member was said to be a direct descendant of one of General Marion's men. Their ages were at least seventy years down to about eighteen years.

The captain was a very pleasant looking man, fully seventy years old, short, thick set, with white hair. Soon after he took command we began to holler, "Rations, where are our rations?" This brought the captain very quickly into camp to find out what we meant. We told him we had no rations and nothing to eat that day. He said he would do all he could for us. Calling all his men together he told them our situation and asked them, all who were not on post, to go home and bring all they could spare for us to eat. In about an hour eatables began to be brought in. Each one brought what they had on hand, bread, cake, pies,

preserves, pickles, etc. Thanks to the good people of Savannah, and especially the Marion Guards, we had a good supper. The next day the captain procured a quantity of rice and sent it to us. The captain, his officers and men were all good soldiers, and every one of them gentlemen. While they were with us not a gun was fired and we began to feel safe. One day the captain came into prison and asked if we would like some reading matter. We said it would be a great luxury to us. That evening a wagon was driven into prison well filled with magazines, books and papers. I got hold of Milton's "Paradise Lost" and read it through several times. They were all passed from one to another, and sometimes, we would get a good reader to read aloud, he was always sure of a good audience. They were with us only about a week when they were relieved by a part of the Second Georgia Regulars under the command of Major Wayne. This regiment had been to the front for some time and was sent to guard us that they might have time to recruit.

Major Wayne was a very rough man. He always left a blue streak of profanity behind him, yet for all that he had a big heart in him. Without doubt he was a brave man, as he had been in many battles and bore a good name with the officers and men of his regiment. He procured tents for us and gave us more and better rations than we had before or after-

wards while we were in prison. I asked of him the privilege of buying and selling a few articles in prison, such as cigars, cakes, bread, writing paper, etc. He even brought in one of his lieutenants and directed him to buy such things for me at the best possible price. I made a few dollars in this way, which enabled me to get a few things I very much needed in my weakened condition.

We were kept here in prison about six weeks, when, very much to our regret we were taken by rail to Charleston, South Carolina, and put in the jail yard. We found that all the other prisoners we had left behind in Macon, had been brought direct to Charleston. We were all taken there to keep our folks from firing on the city from the Swamp Angel Battery. Quite a number of our boys thought we were going to be exchanged very soon. They were much disappointed that we were not.

Few shells were fired into the city during the daytime but as soon as it came night they would begin firing, and many times there would be three or four shells in sight at one time. Most of them were fuse shell and each would leave a streak of sparks behind it similar to a large sky-rocket. They were a beautiful sight. The shells were from eight to twelve inches in diameter and about two feet long. They were fired at an angle of more than twenty-two degrees. They would be fully one mile high before they would turn

to come down. One dark night I lay on my back watching them, when one looked as though it was coming directly at me. I jumped up and ran several feet, when I stopped and thought, "What a fool I am to try to get out of the way in so small a place." I looked up and saw the shell go directly over us, yet high up in the air. It struck over a mile beyond us. I went back and lay down on my side so I could not see them, and then went to sleep. One day several of us were sitting under a small locust tree in one corner of the yard, playing cards, when a shell came over a little to our left, but the fuse being cut several seconds too short, it exploded when it was about three hundred feet in the air. A piece of it about as large as two hands came over and cut the body of the tree off just above our heads. We scratched out on all fours to get out of the way.

Our rations were fair and the officers and men on guard over us were generally kind. We were kept in Charleston about three weeks, when we were sent to Columbia, South Carolina, about the 10th of October, 1864. We were kept a few hours in a vacant lot adjoining a large warehouse filled with bacon. The windows were open but well barred. Our boys were hungry and here was plenty to eat. They soon found sticks about six feet long and drove a nail in one end as a hook. They soon drew out a number of pieces of bacon before they were discovered. Then we were

taken to another part of the town. The next day we were marched out about three miles on top of a high hill to camp. We had no tents or shelter of any kind. Soon after this a cold rain and sleet storm came up which lasted several days. It was hard for the well men to stand and much more so for myself as I was still suffering from my wound and quite weak. About this time three of our officers were taken sick with yellow fever. Dr. LaGrone the surgeon in charge of the camp had a tent pitched several rods from camp and had the sick ones put in it. Dr. LaGrone came in camp to a mess of five or six of our officers and told them that one of their messmates was out in this tent sick with a bad case of yellow fever and wanted one of them to go and take care of him. They all refused to go out. Dr. LaGrone was very angry and justly so, as he came back by me and I asked him what was the trouble. He said three of our officers were outside in a tent very sick with yellow fever and that none of their messmates would go out and take care of them. I told him I would go on one condition, that he would take care of me. He said, "I will do it." He took me out to the tent where I found all three very low with the fever, all were taken with the black vomit that night and died next morning. We buried them under a tree near by. Of course, I was taken with the yellow fever. Dr. LaGrone stood by me like a brother and carried me through all safe. Soon after this he had a

big tent put up as a Yankee Hospital with about a foot of straw to lay on, a luxury to me. The doctor put me in charge of it and also gave me the privilege of walking about within three miles of camp. One day I went over to Saluda Factory. While walking through the village a woman opened a door very slightly and asked who I was. I told her I was a real Yankee. She opened the door and asked me to come in. She sent her little girl to tell one or two other women to come in, saying they were all Union women. I had to keep the women in front of me as my pants had two very large holes in the nether end. I spent a very pleasant two hours with them. They contributed each a little and gave me such a dinner as I had not ate in many a day. (About the middle of March 1910, I went south to visit all the old prisons I was in. At Columbia I hired an automobile and went out to Camp Sorghum, then on to the site of Saluda Factory which General Sherman burnt, but left all the houses in the village. I found the one where the women gave me the good dinner. It looked natural except that the good women were not there.)

One evening not long after this two of the "Confed" officers came to me and invited me to go over to the Factory to a public dance. They wanted to show the young people a real live Yankee. I gladly went with them, but did not dare to dance as that would rouse the envy of some of the young men and I felt

sure that each one carried a revolver and that they would not hesitate to shoot a "damned Yank." A few evenings after this the same officers came to me again saying that some of the young women at the factory had arranged for a private dance at one of their houses and had sent a request to bring the same Yankee with them. I went and had a very pleasant time until about 11 o'clock, when half a dozen young men that were not invited came in and threw red pepper on the floor. This stopped the dancing. One of the young men made a very rough remark about the Yankee being there. One of the officers pulled out a big revolver and handed it to me saying, "Lieutenant Harris, you know how to shoot, take care of yourself." The young men soon left and the girls dampened the floor and the dancing went on. This was the last time I went over there as I considered it too dangerous.

One day a big razor-back hog ran into camp. All the officers were after it. It was fun to see them jump out of the way of its big, long tusks. It was finally killed, cooked and eaten with a relish. Most of the guards could be bought to let out one of our men for a ten-dollar "Confed" bill. Soon Major Griswold found out there were too many prisoners missing. He hired a nigger hunter with a big pack of hounds. He had two valuable tracking hounds that were chained about two feet apart by their collars. The man (or

rather the "brute") would start out horseback, followed by a dozen other brutes or dogs, and ride around the camp. If any Yank had started out for freedom, they would strike his track and follow him to his death or recapture. Our boys thought this too brutal and planned to kill the dogs. The next dark night, three or four of our boys crawled out by Post Twenty. An hour or so afterwards one of the boys crawled out at Post Eighteen which was several rods to the right of Post Twenty, where the others had gone out, he kept well to the right of the others' track for about a mile, then turning to the left crossed their track some ways and came back to camp, and crawled back at a post to the left of the post where the others had gone out. In the morning the nigger hunter and the other brutes started out and soon struck the decoy track following it into camp. Our boys lay in wait. Several tried to catch the chain, but failed. Finally Captain Adams from New York, caught it and stabbed both dogs with a knife. They would never track another Yank. Major Griswold was going to punish those that killed the dogs. He told our Senior Colonel that he would not give us any rations until we gave up the officers. He did not send in any rations that day. The next day our Colonel sent to have him come in. He came, thinking he had starved us out and ready to give up the officers. Instead our Colonel told him unless he sent in our rations within an hour he would order

us to break camp and that if we did we would hang him to the first tree we came to. This scared him and he sent in more than we had had for a long time. This put an end to hunting our officers with bloodhounds.

One pleasant afternoon I took a walk down the road. I soon heard a carriage coming after me, looking back I saw a two-seated carriage with a span of sorrel horses, a darkey driver and two young ladies in the back seat. The one on the right leaned out and motioned to me to stop. I stepped into the bushes that grew close to the road. They stopped close to me. The one near me was a beautiful woman, not thirty years old, the other one was a handsome girl hardly twenty. The elder one asked, "Who are you?" I said "I am a Yankee." She asked again, "Are you surely a Yankee?" I said, "Young Lady, you know that no Southern man could talk the way I do." They both laughed and said that's so. She asked if I knew who she was, I answered that I thought I did. She asked me if I knew that tomorrow was Lincoln's Thanksgiving Day, also whether I had anything to eat on such a day. I said, "Nothing but a little corn bread." She said, "If you will meet me here to-morrow, I will give you something to be thankful for." I was there and she came promptly on time and brought about half a bushel of Yankee soda biscuit with butter for all, several roast chickens with sauce for them. I took it all to the hospital and divided it with about a dozen

sick. I thanked the good woman to the best of my ability. We all thanked our Maker and the good woman that gave us so good a Thanksgiving dinner. We all called her an angel. (Some might call her a fallen angel). Few Southern women would have dared to have done what she did—to give a nice dinner and to show sympathy for the Yankees. It was a very dangerous thing to do.

A full-blooded Old Congo negro who drove a team told me to lie close to the back of the tent and he would come and tell me all about Massa Sherman. He came and lay close to the tent, scratched on it to let me know he was there. I raised up the tent about a foot and he told me all the news. About this time a man came up from Charleston with a big chest of "Confed" paper money, and offered to let any of our officers have \$400.00 for a draft on a northern banker, for \$100.00 in gold. I gave a draft for \$100.00. Major Griswold would not let us keep the money, so I chose Dr. LaGrone to keep mine. I hoped in some way this money would help me out of prison—and it did. A few days after this an order came to send 112 of the sick and wounded to Charleston to be exchanged. I went to Dr. LaGrone and told him I hoped he would send me, as I was one of the worst wounded in camp. He told me that after my name was written—"Not to be exchanged until the end of the war." This was news to me. I said to him "Doctor,

I want you to do me a favor." He laughed and said, "I will do anything I can to help you if it won't compromise me." I told him that I would not do anything that would hurt him. I knew that one of the guards had several gallons of whiskey sent to him from his home. It was regular Mountain Dew and would tangle both the head and feet very quickly. I went to the guard and asked him the cost of a gallon. He said, "\$400.00." I told him to hold a gallon for me. He said, "I will if I get the money." I told him to come with me to Dr. LaGrone. I told him to give the guard the money he had of mine. The doctor thought there might be something wrong. I told him I wanted it to help me on the road to God's country. He said, "All right, go ahead." The next morning, Major Griswold and all his officers gathered at Post No. 1, I went to the guard and got a quart of whiskey, and went over to where Major Griswold stood and passed him the bottle. He asked, "Where did you get that?" I told him it was all right, and referred him to Dr. LaGrone who stood close by. The Major took a big drink and passed it on to the other officers. Soon the bottle came back to me empty. I went to the guard and had it filled again and passed it to one of the officers, the whiskey was taking effect. The Major called out in a loud voice, "Where are all these Yankees that want to be exchanged?" There was quite a crowd of our officers gathered about the gate. I called out to them

to come out and a lot did come out. The Major called out to form in columns of twos, then told two of the officers to count them, one one each side. Before they got far down the line the Yanks would fall out and go around and fall in in front. The officers reported that there were ninety. The Major called for more to come out. They came quick. Another count proved that too many came out, or rather it proved that not quite enough run by the counters. A third count was ordered. This time they were short two or three. In other words, too many "Yanks" had run around. The Major called out to Captain Maltby, "Damn 'em, I guess there is one hundred and twelve of 'em, go along with them." During the first of the counting, Dr. LaGrone and Dr. Coleman came to me and whispered to me to keep out of the way and to keep on the other side of the column, that if the Major should discover some of the tricks he would shoot me as quick as he would a dog. Both the doctors could not help but see the tricks as they neither one had drank any of the whiskey. They likely thought it was none of their business as they were not line officers.

Captain Maltby ordered the column to forward march. They started off with a quick, light step to Columbia and I with them. A thousand thanks to Dr. LaGrone and Dr. Coleman for keeping their mouths shut. One word from them would have ended the whole exchange. We marched to the freight yards in

Columbia and had to wait an hour for the train. While here we counted to see how many of us there was. As I remember there was 256 got out on an order for 112 and a gallon of whiskey to boot, whiskey that cost me four hundred dollars and cheap at that, considering the mighty big favor it did me and one hundred and forty-four other officers. Among us was an officer from West Virginia, who said he was a boyhood chum of Captain Hatch who told us that he could get us all by him all right. The next day we arrived in Charleston. Captain Hatch met us at the depot and directed Captain Maltby to march us to a hotel to camp over night. Our West Virginia officer met Captain Hatch and after a few minutes of very pleasant conversation told Captain Hatch that there was double the number that he had sent for, and he hoped that none of us would be sent back. "No," says Captain Hatch, "if you had brought them all I would put them on board your boats off the harbor." Loud cheers went up when the boys heard that. Captain Hatch told the guards to let us go as we desired. We were likely the roughest, raggedest and most uncouth crowd that ever walked the streets of Charleston or any other city. The sidewalks were lined with white and colored folks to see the live "Yanks." Going down one street, a familiar voice hollered out above us: "Where you going boys?" Looking up, we saw a face sticking out of small hole cut in the gable of a house. We knew he was a Yankee prisoner and

told him that we were on the road to be exchanged, down he came very quickly, bidding his friends good-bye, joined us and was exchanged. He told us that when we were going to the depot to take the cars for Columbia he fell out of the column and this family had secreted him and fed him all the time we were in Columbia. Soon we arrived at the hotel (I think called the City Hotel) where we were to stop over night. Talk about bedlam, hollering, singing and dancing until the small hours of the night when all were exhausted and lay down to sleep. As soon as daylight came some of the boys woke up and began singing "Home, Sweet Home." No more sleep and little to eat, but we cared not, for we were bound for home. About noon Captain Hatch came and gave the order for us to march down to the wharf, where we boarded an English blockade runner with a brutal set of Englishmen for officers and men. Soon we were on board one of our large transports with "Old Glory" floating over us. I wish to say that Captain Hatch was the Rebel Assistant Commissioner of Exchange, and that he was a perfect gentleman with a big heart in him. Maybe you think I wasn't happy when I got on board of our boat. I cried and laughed at the same time for joy.

This was the 12th day of December, 1864. I had been in Rebel prisons nine months and eight days,

during which time I had passed through more trials and escapes than is the general lot of a soldier.

After quite a rough voyage we arrived at Annapolis, Maryland. Lieutenant A. B. Isham, of the 7th Michigan Cavalry, now Dr. Isham, of Walnut Hills, Cincinnati, Ohio, who was one of our party, as soon as we landed he found a friend who lent him ten dollars. He soon found me and told me of his good luck, and said, "Harris, you helped others out of prison and I will help you to Washington." We started for the depot which we reached just as a train started. We arrived in Washington early in the evening. I went to the National Hotel and the first person I met in the lobby was the Hon. Zachariah Chandler. I extended my hand to him. He stepped back and very indignantly asked, "Who are you?" I said, "What there is left of me is Lieutenant Samuel Harris." He said, "I thought you were dead." No," I said, "here I am just out of a Rebel prison." He asked me if I had any money, I said, "Not a cent." He took me up to the clerk of the hotel and told him to give me \$100.00 and to charge it to him and to see that I had a good room and supper. I did not wonder that Mr. Chandler was indignant to have such a dirty-looking ragamuffin as I was try to shake hands with him. I had on part of my old soft black hat with the top gone, part of the wide rim gone, and what was left of it hung down over my left ear. Unshaved, unwashed (I had not seen

soap for over nine months), a part of my old overcoat was trying to hide a piece of a sanitary commission undershirt. A pair of cotton pants that were six inches too short at both ends, three inches too small around, and tied together with a string, a pair of old number ten cowhide shoes, no stockings. I was a bum looking young man. I went to a gents' furnishing store and bought an undress officers suit, then to a bathroom, got a shave and hair cut. I did not know myself. I telegraphed my family that I was alive and well and that I should start for home the next evening.

The next day I went to the War Department and got a leave of absence for a month, drew five hundred dollars pay, and paying back Mr. Chandler the money he kindly let me have, then took the first train for home, where I arrived in due time. It was a glad meeting with my wife, father and mother who did not know that I was alive until they received my telegram.

It may be interesting to know what became of the drafts that a large number of us signed at Columbia for \$100.00 payable in gold for \$400.00 in Confederate paper money. A traitorous captain (one of us) offered to take them to a friend of the loaner in New York. He was taken from prison and sent to Charleston and sent out to our fleet by tug under a "flag of truce," having all the drafts in a satchel. He was sent north on the first dispatch boat. He became very confidential with one of the officers and told him how he got out

of prison by taking the drafts to New York. The officer informed the captain of the boat who immediately ordered the traitorous captain to bring all the drafts to the deck and made him tear each one up and throw them overboard, so the rebel paid the \$400.00 that I gave for the gallon of whiskey. This traitorous captain went South as a carpetbagger and was elected as representative in Congress by negro votes. I was living in Washington after the war and soon found out about the captain, and told several members of congress about him, very soon he was a thirty-cent member.

If you live in the North or in the South, and you hear any one blowing about the war, whether man or woman old or young, quietly tell them that the war closed over fifty years ago.

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